

# Energy Arena

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Driving the Conversation:

Arena Ref: [David Mark](#)

## McConnell's refreshing candor?

Plus, why are voters so angry? And is there too little money in politics?

### [Roger Pilon](#) Vice President for Legal Affairs, Cato Institute :

Mitch McConnell's comment about making Obama "a one-term president" and John Boehner's vow that Republicans will not "compromise on their principles" if they win the majority do indeed challenge "the usual platitudes about bipartisanship and working across the aisle." But they also reflect a deeper problem that the midterm campaigns have begun to unmask; namely, that decades of compromises have brought us to a state where further compromise is no longer tenable. Look at France. Look at Greece. Look even at England.

I allude, of course, to the "entitlement" schemes that are sinking all western democracies -- others more than ours. These are giant Ponzi schemes that would be criminal if undertaken by private parties, because like all such schemes, they're unsustainable, with late entrants left holding the bag. But unlike their private counterparts, the public versions force us all to play. Yet as the day of reckoning approaches, government has only limited choices: either reduce the promised benefits, or pay for them by taxing or borrowing more or by selling government assets (e.g., western lands), each of which has inherent limits, or by printing money, which is another way of breaking promises -- and it ends ultimately in a death spiral. That's the hard reality. Government isn't Santa Claus.

So when Obama governs as though he has no grasp of that reality, talk of a one-term presidency is simply coming to grips with reality. And if this election is any indication, Americans appear increasingly to appreciate that. To be sure, there are issues on which to compromise. But for far too long we've acted as if every issue were "political," from retirement security to health care to so many other "problems" that in truth are simply the problems of life. Earlier generations solved those problems privately, either by themselves or in voluntary association with others. Indeed, the freedom to do so was what the Constitution was written to secure.

But progressives disdained that kind of freedom as illusory. They wanted us to solve our problems collectively. The New Deal institutionalized that vision, of course, turning the Constitution on its head. Thus today's progressives think that nearly every "problem" is a

political problem, to be solved collectively -- utterly ignoring the evidence of the ages about such collective undertakings. Sarkozy has prevailed for the moment in France, but strikes continue to cripple the economy, and the opposition has promised to make him pay in the next election. One can hope only that American voters will take a different course and that those they elect next Tuesday will have the wisdom to know when and when not to compromise, because this cannot go on forever.